

Keeping Our Heads Above Water

December 2006

Our e-newsletter finally has a name! Any cartoonists or graphic artists out there who could create a little illustration? We're going to post this FLO-generated portion of the newsletter on our website (www.state.gov/m/dghr/flo/c14521.htm) a month or so after its electronic distribution, so a picture would be nice to enliven the text. Please send to FLOAskUT@state.gov or LeiningerNW@state.gov. Thanks!

Question of the Month

Q. When is the next Orientation Session for learning more about the support services available to us as employees and family members on Unaccompanied Tours? How can I participate?

A. Coming right up on Thursday, Dec. 7, at 8:15 AM (Eastern Time). The simultaneous free conference call and webcast of PowerPoint slides takes about one hour, including time for Q & A. FLO is setting up in Room 1207 (HST) for anyone in the DC area who would like to attend in person – especially welcome would be tandem spouses, Members of Household (MOHs) and newly assigned personnel who are in DC. Added bonus – you'll get to meet others facing the same challenges! Folks around the world are invited to participate by calling 1-800-531-3250 from a US phone line; use 2016466 for the Conference Code. To get the web portion, go to www.raindance.com and click "join conference" then SCROLL DOWN to "Join Reservationless Conference Call" and enter your name (first name or nickname is sufficient), email address and the same Conference Code (2016466). You will be able to ask questions!

ANNOUNCING: **The Directory of UT Families!** These are the parameters:

- **participation is completely voluntary,**
- **participation is open to family members (using FLO's very inclusive definition of "family") who are, recently were, or soon will be experiencing an UT,**
- **you include only the information you are comfortable sharing** (name and email is enough; but of course, including more info about where you live would help find 'neighbors'),
- **the information is not to be shared or distributed in any way,** nor used for commercial purposes, and
- **the Directory will be circulated to other participants only.**

There is a common lament we hear from so many of you:

1) From “left behind” family members: Even those fortunate to have family and friends nearby say, “They don’t really ‘get’ why I’m sad or anxious. *Wish I could meet other families going through this!*”

2) From Parents: My kids think they are the only ones missing Mom/Dad. *How can I help them feel less isolated?*

3) From Employees preparing for an Unaccompanied Assignment: I’m worried about leaving my family alone, especially since we haven’t really lived in the US for most of our adult lives. *How can they connect with people who understand?*

FLO recently partnered with AAFSW (Associates of the American Foreign Service Worldwide) and the FSYF (Foreign Service Youth Foundation) to hold the first gathering of families experiencing an Unaccompanied Tour (UT) in the DC area. A few newly assigned employees also came or sent their family members. It was a great event and we plan to do another one here in January, and one on April 1 in Houston, TX; and we are looking into Florida, too. These are places where we see a concentration of UT families – it would help if we knew where more of you live! (Yes, this is another shameless plug for filling out the Contact Information form – go to FLO’s website, above.) And, of course, it would help if **you** knew who was nearby, if any, going through the same kind of situation. Even if you can’t find someone close by physically, there may be someone with similar aged children or interests with whom you could communicate. Go to the FLO webpage for the form (see above).

We sincerely hope this will facilitate more communication among UT employees and families, and foster the development of mutually supportive networks. Of course, Nan Leininger is available for in-person visits if you are near DC, and always welcomes individual emails (see above) and phone calls (1-800-440-0397 or 202-647-3179).